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ABSTRACT

Teacher education programs should stress the development of classroom management skills before and during preservice teachers' field experiences. Research on interpersonal communications, as related to the role of the teacher and the teaching situation has identified a need for increased effectiveness in facilitative interpersonal functioning and classroom dynamics. These traits can be taught to preservice teachers. Components of a comprehensive classroom management curriculum for preservice teacher education should concentrate on strengthening communication skills, building good teacher-pupil relationships, and facilitating responsible behavior. Methods for dealing with aspects of management during student teaching are handled cooperatively between student teachers and the university supervisor. (Author/JD)

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Interpersonal Skill Development: A Neglected Component of Teacher Education

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Abstract

The research and ideas reviewed include interpersonal communication as related to the role of teacher and the teaching situation. A need for skill development in Teacher Education programs is identified. This need focuses upon increased effectiveness in facilitative interpersonal functioning and classroom dynamics. Included as suggested components of a comprehensive classroom management curriculum at the application level are: Strengthening Communication Skills, Building Good Teacher-pupil Relationships and Facilitating Responsible Behavior. Methods for dealing with the above aspects of management during student teaching are described.

INTRODUCTION

A number of researchers have in common a belief that the mastery of human relations skills is considered to be as essential to the total development of a prospective teacher as is the mastery of academic subject matter. It is largely through affective skills that teachers learn to create an effective learning climate and a positive classroom atmosphere. Data clearly support the need for affective skills (Aspy, 69; Combs, 78; Good, 75; Rosenshine, 73; Kounin, 70; Gazda, 72, Peck and Veldman, 73; Carkhuff, 76). Almost two decades ago the writing of Earl Kelley spoke of the need for "teachers sensitive to feelings and values and able to provide a climate to facilitate self discovery, good relationships, respect for uniqueness and open communication."

This article addresses that need and identifies certain elements of classroom management needing skill development in teacher education programs.

Aspy and Roebuck (1977) have published ten years of research findings indicating that the skills for establishing good interpersonal relationships with children can be taught to teachers, and the closer the training is to the desired act, the greater the probability it will be used in the classroom. Their research points out that the real difference between teachers is the results of their instructional-interpersonal style. Rogerian theory (1962) also tells us that the quality of the interpersonal relationship between teacher and learner is an important condition which facilitates learning.

A research report on classroom management (Brophy and Putnam, 78) discusses the importance of teacher characteristics, "teachers' success in managing classrooms will be determined not only by their skills and techniques, but also by their personal qualities and the effects these qualities have upon students."

I profess agreement with all of the above research findings and stress their work in developing a conceptual basis for the elements of a classroom management curriculum. After having observed countless student teachers attempting to establish an effective classroom climate, I have concluded that we sell them short by not developing facilitative teaching behaviors before and during that time in which they encounter the difficulties of classroom management.

Historically speaking, some teacher education institutions have provided exposure only to a philosophical framework for classroom management while others have provided little or no coursework in this area. Perhaps this is because there is no single source or theory of systematic classroom management. However, there are many commonalities across the various sources to provide us with theory and practice for the teacher education student. There is clearly a need for the development of methods for dealing with specific aspects of classroom management. Brophy and Putnam (1978) suggest that "systematically integrated classroom management content-method-practice courses be developed as a part of the Foundations of Teaching sequence offered by colleges of education."

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

As I witnessed expressions of need from student teachers vis a vis the supervisory process, I have attempted to respond by drawing upon the methodology of theorists and practitioners and matching their strategies to the needs of learners and learning situations.

The successes and failures which student teachers experienced by exhibiting specific behaviors and skills in turn became the focus for seminars. Classroom problems were identified, and solutions were sought and shared.

specific areas of need surfaced again and again. Students needed to strengthen communication skills, build teacher-pupil relationships, resolve conflicts and facilitate responsible behavior. There was clearly a call for increased effectiveness in the realm of facilitative interpersonal functioning.

My goal has been to aid students in developing a plan of action that had a high priority on facilitating the learner's personal growth while fostering responsible behavior with a preventive approach. Skills and strategies were selected that had an emphasis on problem solving, communication, and democratic processes. They were a composite of the complementary aspects of various theories; practical enough to delineate specific teaching behaviors that lead to a positive classroom climate.

The field experience allows excellent opportunities for students to practice constructive techniques, but it is difficult to allow sufficient time for adequate instruction, integration of skills into strategies and controlled practice experiences.

Concepts involved in social-emotional education and principles behind problem solving approaches and preventive discipline should be organized into a body of knowledge for classroom management curriculum. Instruction could be provided before the behavioral emphasis stage of preparation. It would then be possible for the role of college supervisor to change to that of clinical professor; documenting behavior, continuing instruction and development of skills, and providing evaluative feedback.

As mentioned before, areas needing development resulted from an articulation of need by students in the field. A rationale and brief description of methods and practice selected for development follows.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

"Establishing good relationships with students is desirable because it is an important preventive management method, among other reasons. Other things being equal, students will be more likely to pay attention and cooperate when the teacher is a person with whom they share a valued personal relationship (vs. an impersonal authority figure)." Brophy and Putnam (1978)

In order to nurture the learner's growth, a teacher trainee's first step is to concentrate on building relationships by communicating acceptance and understanding. Research has been consistent in affirming the importance of core conditions identified by Carl Rogers (1969) as: empathy, respect and congruence. When teachers listen with respect and communicate real understanding, rapport is established. Certainly it follows that prospective teachers must develop good communication skills for interacting with the learner. Ginot (1972) and Gordon(1974) translate therapeutic concepts into educational practices as they offer an approach to communication skills for the classroom. They urge teachers to communicate acceptance and understanding to pupils, express feelings, clarify expectations, and listen non-judgmentally. Including strategies from these practitioners helps to develop a sensitivity to, and an awareness of classroom relationships as it provides communication skills for interacting with the learner.

Because the child's self concept is a significant factor in his ability to learn, it follows that awareness and appreciation of self and others must be fostered if he is to grow emotionally and intellectually. Combs (1962) lists "a positive view of self" as one of the four necessary characteristics of an adequate person. He suggests that "in order to produce a positive self it is necessary to provide experiences that teach individuals that they are positive people." Beane, Lipka and Ludewig's "Synthesis of the Research

on Self Concept" (1980) succinctly suggest that schools can contribute to student's self esteem by: "Creating a climate characterized by democratic procedures, student participation in decision making, personalness, respect, fairness, self-discipline, interaction and flexibility."

There are many excellent references for the practitioner. I have included practices from (Canfield, 75; Elkins, 76; Simon, 72; Howe & Howe, 75; Ballard, 75; Timmerman, 76) in my seminar presentations. Ultimately, student teachers can select and attempt to implement strategies and activities designed to help children seek positive qualities in themselves and others, take inventory of their own perceptions, and gain insight into self concept change.

FACILITATING RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOR

So far, the areas of skill development have dealt with establishing positive interpersonal relationships. A wide range of skills and attitudes are needed to keep relationships positive while meeting mutual needs of teachers and learners. It has been well documented that beginning teachers encounter the most difficulty facilitating appropriate behavior and reducing inappropriate behavior.

A humanistic approach offers techniques which help teachers to foster responsible behavior without relying upon authoritarian measures. Learning to use attitudes and techniques which deal with unacceptable behavior requires patience and careful guidance. I have found that most students begin the field experience unaware of dysfunctional skills that block communication. Gordon's training program (1974) has been beneficial in helping students "unlearn" roadblocks to communication. Using his problem solving process for resolving classroom conflicts has also proven effective in keeping relationships positive.

If, as educators, our goal is to achieve a balance of freedom and responsibility for the learner, George Brown (1971) suggests we need to "increase (his) sense of power to take responsibility for his behavior - let the learner begin by taking responsibility for self and (then) move to taking responsibility for others."

Teachers need to help children understand the impact of their behavior on themselves and others. Dreikurs (1972) and Glasser (1969) provide ways of increasing awareness, evaluating intentions and redirecting behavior. Helping a child to become self directed involves giving him the opportunity to make decisions. Encouraging decision making says, "I trust you and think you are capable." Building and maintaining trust results in fewer classroom conflicts and indicates the presence of sound interpersonal relationships. Thus building relationships, improving learner's self esteem, and facilitating responsible behavior demonstrate a cyclical pattern that can be effective in creating a positive classroom climate.

CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on the need for strengthening human relations skills which encourage both teacher and pupil to function at their best. Problems encountered in classroom settings led to an articulation of needs during seminar sessions. Students of teaching then experimented with teaching behaviors and practices in order to develop a personal plan of action for their individual needs. My goal has been to help future teachers establish and maintain meaningful and rewarding relationships with their pupils and create a classroom climate characterized by cooperation and rapport.

The complexity of many of the needed behaviors requires a thorough theoretical understanding and an opportunity for controlled practice of management techniques. It is recommended that teacher educators include the elements identified in this paper with other management methods and integrate them into a comprehensive curricula for the preservice program.

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